



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

June 15, 2023

The Honorable Rena Bitter
Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs
Bureau of Consular Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Bitter:

I am writing to follow-up on last week's House Foreign Affairs Oversight and Accountability Subcommittee hearing and the unacceptable 13-week passport processing backlog. This is an issue that my constituents are greatly impacted by, and it is imperative that the State Department clear this backlog in a timely manner.

According to Secretary Blinken's testimony before the House Appropriations Committee on March 23, 2023, passport demand is 30-40 percent higher than last year. This demand has produced untenable wait times, with passport applications now taking several months to process.

The State Department's inability to surge to address increased volume is a failure. The backlog is particularly frustrating when it comes to renewals given the reduced work that must go into an update versus a first issuance.

This sustained issue requires a more aggressive approach than the State Department has yet provided. It is my understanding that while technology can certainly speed up the process, a personnel surge is clearly needed to clear the backlog in a timely manner. This includes, but is not limited to, all personnel returning to in-person work.

As I prepare legislation in response to this critical problem, I would appreciate your immediate attention to these questions.

1. What is the Bureau's plan to reduce wait times and what specific measures does the Bureau intend to take over the course of the next six months to do so?
2. When does the Bureau believe its current plans will reduce the backlog to no more than two weeks?

3. When it comes to renewals, what barriers does the Bureau face to training and surging appropriately cleared personnel to address the backlog, either Department personnel, personnel from other U.S. Government Agencies, or contractors?
4. Are there retired Departmental personnel which could be recalled to help adjudicate passports?

Further, I appreciate your collaboration on advancing technology uses to streamline and improve the process, including an examination of an increased use of artificial intelligence, automation, online application submission, or further digitization.

I look forward to working with you to help the Bureau solve this pressing problem swiftly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Darrell E. Issa', with a stylized, flowing script.

Darrell E. Issa
Member of Congress